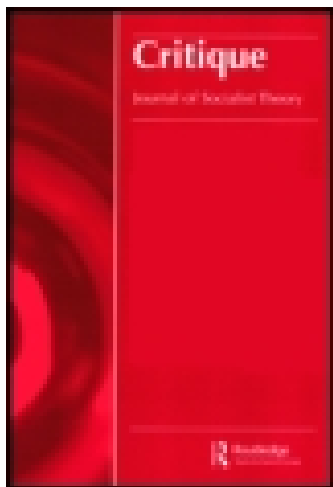


This article was downloaded by: [The University of Manchester Library]
On: 30 October 2014, At: 04:09
Publisher: Routledge
Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number:
1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street,
London W1T 3JH, UK



Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcso20>

Roman Rosdolsky—A genuine marxist scholar

ICP

Published online: 08 Nov 2007.

To cite this article: ICP (1979) Roman Rosdolsky—A genuine marxist scholar , Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory, 10:1, 103-107, DOI: [10.1080/03017607908413245](https://doi.org/10.1080/03017607908413245)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03017607908413245>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims,

proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Roman Rosdolsky

—A Genuine Marxist Scholar*

Roman Rosdolsky, who died in Detroit, Michigan, last November, was the last survivor of the founders of the Communist movement in the western Ukraine and one of the most remarkable Marxists of recent decades.

Rosdolsky's fate was characteristic of that of a whole generation of European revolutionists; it was exceptional only in that he was able to survive the persecution attendant on home-grown fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism.

He was born in the city of Lvov (Lemberg) in 1898. At that time, this Ukrainian city belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After 1918, it was annexed by Poland. In September 1939 it was conquered by the Soviet army. In 1941, it was occupied by the Nazis. In 1944 it was liberated by the Soviet army and from then on merged into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Rosdolsky's father was a well-known Ukrainian scholar; and he passed on to his son an acute national feeling for his oppressed national group. While still in high school, the young Rosdolsky became a socialist and an internationalist. Drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army in 1915, he participated in the formation of an underground socialist organization to fight against the imperialist war. This group expressed solidarity with Austrian socialists like Friedrich Adler in rebellion against social patriotism. He published a little journal and became an enthusiastic supporter of the October revolution from its outset.

Rosdolsky joined the international Communist movement at the time it was founded. He was one of the initial organizers of the Communist party of the western Ukraine, whose entire Central Committee was exterminated by Stalin during the infamous purges of the 1930's. In 1925, he refused to vote for the condemnation of Trotsky and the Soviet Left Opposition because he lacked sufficient information to make a judgement. He was not yet a 'Trotskyist' at the time but sympathized rather with the Bukharin tendency. He was expelled from the CP at the end of the 1920's.

In the meantime, he had come to live in Vienna where he became a correspondent of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow; he was charged with preparing the scholarly edition of the complete works of Marx and Engels (*Marx-Engels Gesamt Ausgabe*) under Riazanov's direction. He had the task of searching in the Austrian archives for documents relating to Marx, Engels, and the beginnings of the socialist movement.

* This article originally appeared in *Quatrième Internationale*, April 1968, and subsequently in this English translation in *Intercontinental Press*, June 1968. It appears here by kind permission.

It was during his stay in Vienna that he became convinced of the correctness of Trotsky's criticism both of the Stalinist policy in the USSR and of the Communist International's catastrophic course which was to lead to Hitler's seizure of power in Germany.

The suppression of the Austrian workers' movement by Dolfuss in February 1934 forced him to leave Vienna and return to Lvov. He joined the Trotskyist movement there and was one of the editors of a Trotskyist journal in the Ukrainian language, which was circulated chiefly among the oil-field workers in eastern Galicia.

The outbreak of the second world war forced him into a long and tragic odyssey, in the course of which he was imprisoned in the concentration camps of Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Oranienburg, ending finally in the United States. Although he held a doctor's degree and had served as a professor at the University of Lvov shortly before the second world war, the 'cold war' atmosphere closed the doors of the American universities to him. He worked chiefly as a publicist and received some fellowships for his scholarly studies.

By education and personal inclination, Rosdolsky was first of all a Marxist historian. Combining a complete knowledge and grasp of Marxist methodology as it had been applied by the masters of Marxist historiography — Marx himself, Mehring, and Trotsky — with a mastery of the academic techniques, he was able to write several books which will progressively come to be appreciated as classics of their kind.

In the 1930's, he wrote a study of the village community in Galicia as well as a two-volume history of serfdom in the same province, which was published only in 1959 in Poland. In the 1940's, he wrote a profound study of the incorrect positions which Frederick Engels and the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* adopted toward the small Slavic nations during the revolution of 1848. This study was published only in 1964. In the 1950's, he wrote a book on the great fiscal and agrarian reform of the Austrian emperor Joseph II, which was published in 1961 by the Academy of Sciences in Warsaw. In the last years of his life, he was collecting material for a book on a subject of great historical importance: the Austrian workers' reaction to the appeals for world revolution launched by Trotsky during the Brest-Litovsk peace negotiations and the reasons why revolution did not break out in Austria and Germany in January-February 1918.

Of all these works, there is no doubt that his book *Frederick Engels and the Problem of the Peoples Without a History*¹ can be considered the most brilliant.

Applying the Marxist analytical method to the writings of Marx and Engels themselves, Rosdolsky demonstrated convincingly that the two

1. This book has been published thus far only in German. (The Verlag für Literatur und Zeitgeschehen, 3 Hannover, Georgstrasse 50 B. It is volume four of this publisher's *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*).

founders of scientific socialism were led into error by an insufficient analysis of the social forces active in the revolution of 1848. As a result, he showed, they were led to formulate negative judgements in regard to nationalities such as the Czechs, Croats, Ukrainians, and Slovaks, condemning them in a group as 'counterrevolutionary'.

Rosdolsky proved that in certain regions like Galicia the political division between the 'revolutionary' Poles and Hungarians on the one hand and the 'counterrevolutionary' Croats, Czechs, Slovaks, and Ukrainians on the other represented a class division between the landed nobility and the peasantry. This peasantry was not predestined to go over to the camp of the counterrevolution. To the contrary, it had sent revolutionary representatives to the Vienna Assembly who were ready to join the revolution if the peasants' principal demand, 'land to the peasantry', were satisfied. But the 'revolutionary' landed nobility obstinately refused to give them satisfaction. Thus, despairing of the cause, the peasants were thrown into the arms of the emperor.

This book should be translated into many languages as a classic example of Marxist historiography, a book as honest as it is profound.

Although Rosdolsky was a historian by training, his scholarly interests turned to the realm of political economy in the last twenty years of his life. Having landed in New York as an emigré right after the second world war, he discovered there by accident one of the three or four copies of Marx's *Grundrisse* (Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy) which had thus far reached the West.² This monumental 'preliminary sketch' of *Capital*, which had been unknown until then to all Marx specialists, fascinated Rosdolsky to the end of his days. As he was to write himself, it enabled him to get a glimpse into the laboratory where Marx developed the discoveries which would shake the world.

From then on the analysis of the *Grundrisse* and the popularization of its principal arguments became an essential task for him. He wrote numerous articles on this subject which appeared in publications like *Kyklos* (Switzerland), *Arbeit und Wirtschaft* (the magazine of the Austrian trade unions), *Science and Society* (U.S.), etc. He also published an article on the same subject in the January-February 1954 issue of *Quatrième Internationale* under the pseudonym of Lerner.

These articles were to lay the groundwork for a magnum opus: *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Marxchen Kapitals* (History of the Origins of Marx's *Capital*).³ This book is an analysis of the *Grundrisse* — in fact the second published so far (the first was by a Japanese professor).

2. The first German edition of the *Grundrisse* appeared in Moscow on the eve of the Nazi invasion of the USSR, only a few copies reaching the West. The second edition in 1953 was better circulated. The first edition in French just appeared in 1967, published by Anthropos.

3. This book will be published in May 1968 by the Europäische Verlagsanstalt in Frankfurt.

But it is not just an analysis. It is also a scrupulously thorough examination of the development of Marx's thought in the 1850's; and, in connection with this, it is as well a cogent and effective defense of the basic elements of the Marxist economic theory against attempts to revise it, both in the workers' movement and in academic circles.

Rosdolsky modestly called himself a 'Marxist scholar', that is a researcher specialized in determining what Marx did or did not mean by this or that concept and in this or that passage in his writings. But his own definition does not do him justice. Few Marxists have penetrated as deeply into the thought of Karl Marx. Far from being limited to a few scholarly notes, his commentaries on the *Grundrisse* offer real revelations on Marx's general method and the general meaning of his theory.

After his emigration to the United States, Rosdolsky ceased to be active politically; but he never stopped considering himself a sympathizer of the international Trotskyist movement. Although an intimate friend of the deceased Isaac Deutscher, he did not share Deutscher's hopes for a gradual transition of the bureaucratic dictatorship into a socialist democracy in the Soviet Union. His differences with the Fourth International bore for example on the evaluation of events like the Korean war and the Hungarian revolution. But in the last years of his life these differences crystallized around the question of how properly to define a state in which capitalism has been overthrown but the proletariat does not directly exercise political power.

He believed that the degenerated workers state formula developed by Trotsky thirty years ago no longer corresponded to the reality and that if the socialist revolution continued to be delayed in the advanced imperialist countries the possibility could not be excluded that the bureaucracy would become a class. Occasionally, he used the formula 'state socialist' to characterize such states, but with many hesitations and circumlocutions.

The urgency he felt to finish his scholarly works took precedence over his interest in the day-to-day course of politics; however, before his death Roman Rosdolsky witnessed with great pleasure two developments that confirmed his full and complete confidence in the final victory of Lenin and Trotsky's ideas, for which he had not ceased to struggle for a half century: the reappearance of a left communist opposition in Poland, crystallized by Kuron and Modzelewski's 'Open Letter'; and the mass character of the student rebellion against the Vietnam war in the United States itself. His reactions to these events proved that he died as he had lived: a revolutionary of the classical school of internationalist Marxism.

Events brought him a final posthumous justification: the national oppression which the Ukrainian nationality suffered under the Stalin regime is now implicitly recognized by several official Communist

parties, and first of all by the Canadian one, a great number of whose members are of Ukrainian origin.⁴

In the Soviet Ukraine itself, in spite of all the overt and covert attempts at Russification, the struggle has begun to re-establish the rights of the Ukrainian language as the official language of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. Here also Roman Rosdolsky will not have struggled in vain.

4. See the January 1968 issue of the Canadian CP discussion bulletin *Viewpoint*, which published a long report by an official delegation from this party sent to the Soviet Ukraine. The report mirrored the intense debates in progress in the Ukraine itself on the question of the national rights of the Ukrainian people.

Announcing

CAHIERS LÉON TROTSKY

First issue, to appear shortly, will contain:

Founding documents of the 1938 Conference of the Fourth International
(The French and English texts of the invitation and the minutes compared)

Pierre Broué: Some Close Collaborators of Leon Trotsky

Rodolphe Prager: An Interview with Jan van Heijenoort

Michel Kehrnon: Yessenin and Trotsky

George Breitman: When Hitler's newspaper printed a letter by Trotsky

Léon Trotsky: On the Philosophy of the Superman

Michel Dreyfus and Jean-François Godchau: Bibliographical Notes: Latest international works and publications on Trotsky and the world Trotskyist movement

Subscription Rates

For three issues a year, post free in Britain and Ireland, 70 New Francs
(approx £8.50).

Pay by foreign draft through your bank to:

Institut Léon Trotsky

29 rue Descartes, 75005 Paris, France